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LETTER DATED 3 MAY 1999 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to forward herewith an address to the nation made by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on the occasion of the thirty-eighth anniversary of the independence of Sierra Leone.

It would be appreciated if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fode M. DABOR
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Address made on 27 April 1999 by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to the nation on the occasion of the thirty-eighth anniversary of the independence of Sierra Leone

Fellow citizens,

Some 38 years ago, this country was divided. There were different and even conflicting views on the issue of independence. The division threatened a smooth transition to nationhood. However, in a spirit of compromise, and for the larger interest of the country, those wise and patriotic Sierra Leoneans who were aspiring for political leadership took a bold and historic step. Their duly registered political parties formed a United Front and went to London's Marlborough House for the final constitutional talks with the colonial Government. As a result of that bold step, we gained our freedom as an independent sovereign State, peacefully, on 27 April 1961. Without their display of that wisdom and patriotism, things would have been otherwise for this country.

Today, 27 April 1999, as we commemorate that historic occasion, our country is again divided. But the division this time is much more serious. On the one hand, there are those, the overwhelming majority of our people, who, in spite of the difficult economic and social problems facing the country, prefer to work hard within the democratic system, with an elected Government, and to help bring about a better life for themselves and their families. On the other hand, there are others, a minority, who, in collusion with external forces, have chosen the path of war and wanton destruction of life and property as a means of articulating their own personal grievances.

The observance of this, the thirty-eighth anniversary of our independence, should take the form of a special thanksgiving. We should be thankful today that Sierra Leone as a nation still exists, because there are those who were, and perhaps are still determined to destroy the entire country, unless their demands are met. We should be thankful that the objective of the Revolutionary United Front rebels, "Operation no living thing" has failed. Of course, significant parts of the body of this nation have been burned, terrorized, raped and mutilated. Of course, the RUF rebels and their allies had derailed significant parts of our development plans and projects. But the spirit, the hopes and aspirations of this nation are intact. For this we are thankful.

We, as a Government, are greatly concerned for the basic rights of our citizens, which we regard as inviolate. We have taken into consideration the impact of their vicious campaign and the atrocities perpetrated on innocent people. Consistent with our determination to strengthen existing mechanisms for the protection of the basic rights of every individual in this country, we have now decided, as soon as conditions permit, to set up a separate and independent Human Rights Commission. Operating a quasi-judicial body, the Commission will be empowered to hear complaints and investigate allegations of human rights violations. It will also devise further recourse procedures and relief for victims of such violations. Since the most vulnerable victims of human rights

abuses have been women and children, the new Human Rights Commission will have two specialized committees with the responsibility for developing, on the basis of the constitution, standards for the protection of their rights against violations by individuals or groups.

During the past three decades, we have witnessed four major military coups, two counter-coups, at least five attempted coups, and four "palace coups" in which the leader of a military junta is unceremoniously removed and replaced by another officer. Then, during the same period, we have experienced eight long years of a bloody rebellion.

Fellow citizens,

The consequences of those events have taught us a number of lessons. The first is that coups, counter-coups, palace coups, and a brutal war against the people and every Government of this country over the last eight years have not solved any of our economic, social or political problems. In fact, they have increased the number and complexity of those problems. They have taken a heavy toll on all aspects of life in this country. They have resulted in wanton killing of our kith and kin. They have caused more hunger, more homelessness, a higher incidence of communicable diseases, and a massive exodus of thousands of our people. Coups, counter-coups, and a seemingly endless rebel war have stolen and squandered food from our children; deprived them of education and health services. They have also given them guns and other weapons of destruction. Coups, counter-coups and rebel conflict have indeed made us poorer. They continue to deprive us of much-needed assistance from our international development partners.

The RUF rebels and their allies should now realize that the days of forceful overthrow of democratically elected Governments are over. Therefore, they should have the courage to admit that, after eight years of sheer terror, they have failed to win the most important prerequisite for governance, namely, the will of the people. So, we say to them: E dooh so now. Pas mark ting not good.

Another lesson which events of the past 38 years have taught us is that, for developing countries like Sierra Leone, the prospects for achieving economic self-sufficiency and social equality are much greater when we are at peace than when we are engaged in political turmoil. We have learned that repeated and wanton destruction of our human and material resources are inconsistent with, and an anathema to, national development.

A third lesson we have learned from the unfortunate events since independence is that there is an alternative to coups, rebel wars and violence as means of bringing about viable change. That alternative is peace. We, for our part, have convincingly demonstrated to the rebels, and to the world, that the only way we can transform this country from its current economic, social and political situation, is through peaceful means. Our message to the RUF rebels, on this, the anniversary of our independence, which incidentally we achieved by peaceful means 38 years ago today, is that if indeed they are genuinely interested in peace, if indeed they want to rule, or if they want political power in any proportion, they must first secure the will of the people of Sierra

Leone. Let them abandon the idea of seizing it by force of arms. Instead of holding the rest of the country hostage and demanding power, they should try to earn it, peacefully, through the ballot box. As the leaders of the RUF are aware, even some of their staunch supporters have come to realize that, when all is said and done, the ballot box is still the only way of gaining legitimacy for democratic governance.

Today, on the anniversary of our independence, we challenge the RUF rebels to renounce violence and terror. We challenge them to meet us at the polling booths in less than 16 months' time. They can now start preparing for the electoral process. One of the great pillars of our justice system, the Court of Appeal, has already given the RUF rebels a head start by allowing their leader, Foday Sankoh, to travel to Togo, under United Nations auspices, to meet his comrades-in-arms for consultations. We have given them an opportunity to discuss, not just the necessity of laying down their arms but, equally, to start learning how to use democratic institutions and processes to articulate their grievances. Indeed, to begin the task of transforming themselves from rebels or revolutionaries to patriotic functionaries for peace and stability in Sierra Leone.

To all my fellow citizens, loyal as well as rebels, I say this:

We have lost 38 years. Let us all rededicate ourselves to making good those lost years. Some of us have lost everything we worked for, including our lives, others have lost their limbs and other priceless possessions. To you all I say, don't despair! Let us continue to have faith in God and hope that He will address all our concerns in due course.

Fellow citizens,

It is unfortunate that some of our friends who are great defenders of democracy, some of those who pledge allegiance to uphold their constitution as the supreme law of their respective nations, now expect us to violate the provisions of our own democratic constitution and make arbitrary changes of accommodation without the consent of our people. This will clearly be a prescription for future chaos and instability in our country, a situation which the people of Sierra Leone will not tolerate. Sierra Leone may be one of the least developed countries in the world, but we are a democracy, and we are proud of it. Let me add that, even if we find it necessary to make substantive changes to any section of our constitution, we will, as in other democracies, do so only with the consent of our people, and in accordance with the relevant provisions for amending that supreme document of State. After all, we allowed Foday Sankoh to meet his rebel colleagues. Why not at least extend the same courtesy to patriotic Sierra Leoneans?

It is significant that the start of internal consultations in Togo, among the leaders of the RUF, coincides with the observance of the thirty-eighth anniversary of our peaceful transition to nationhood. This we sincerely believe is a great opportunity for us all, including members of the RUF, to open a new chapter in our history. Now is the time, brothers and sisters, for us to solemnly launch a peaceful transition in our country, from acts of self-

destruction to the urgent duties of national reconstruction. Now is the time not just for reconciliation but, more importantly, for reformation.

While we are fully aware of the role of external forces in the destabilization of our beloved country, we should also realize that the solution to our problems lies in our own hands. We have the capacity. We have the resources. Now, we have to muster the will to put this country back on the right track by peaceful means.

Let us, on this, the anniversary of our independence, paraphrase the second verse of the Sierra Leone national anthem, and pray that no more harm on our children may fall, and:

"... That blessing and peace may descend on us all.
So, may we serve Thee ever alone,
Land that we love, our Sierra Leone."

Finally, I should like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely all the fighting forces, from Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana and Mali, who are here to help us resolve problems which we have created for ourselves. We are most grateful to them. We should all open our doors to them on this anniversary for them to feel at home. Another way we could say thanks to them is for us to make sure and make a determined effort to see to it that we resolve our problems, and thereby achieve sustainable peace for our country.

I wish you all a blessed independence anniversary. Long live Sierra Leone.

I thank you all.